

TREATMENT

Making those old joints feel a lot better ...

By **Liza Schneider***

AS PETS AGE they may suffer from arthritis. It can be a painful condition and is usually noticeable as a stiff gait first thing in the morning (often worse in cold weather), which improves with a bit of exercise or movement.

Arthritis describes inflammation in a joint and may be attributable to many factors. It is generally a progressive condition, but we can do a great deal to slow the course of the disease and make your pet a lot more comfortable for the rest of its days.

It's very important to keep your pet's weight under control. Carrying around extra baggage is a huge burden on the joints and lightening the load will help the animal to function better and cut down on the pain.

Ensuring that your pet eats good-quality food with optimal amounts of omega 3 fatty acids, which are natural anti-inflammatories, helps them to maintain a good weight and joint health.

Supplementing their diet with omega 3 (found in flax oil and cold water fish) is a fabulous aid to supporting joint function and just making this change can make a noticeable difference.

Next on the list and clinically proven to help are chondroprotective (joint-protecting) agents called polysulphated glucosaminoglycans (P-Gags) or glucosamine. These are naturally occurring substances found in green-lipped mussel extract, shark cartilage and other sources.

There are many supplements available but as with all supplements it's important to remember that they aren't all created equal. Some work better than others



and may be more appropriate for your animal than others.

It is very important to ensure that the supplement is of good quality and has nutrients that are bio-available. This means that they are easy for the body to digest, absorb and utilise.

There is also an injectable form of P-gags that can be used alone or in conjunction with the above. It, too, can work wonders. Usually we do a course of four injections under the skin (not necessarily into the joint), once a week for four weeks and most animals show an improvement in their condition by the third or fourth injection.

Another invaluable nutrient, from grapeseed or pinebark extract, are proanthocyanidins. They act as powerful antioxidants which assist joint function and well-being.

Ginger and turmeric (curcumin) can be helpful to



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In addition to all of these are alternative and complementary therapy options such as homeopathy and herbal medicine, acupuncture, the Neurological Integration System (NIS) and hyperbaric oxygen therapy as well as musculo-skeletal therapies such as chiropractics and Bowen therapy, which have proven to be very valuable aids. For optimal results these are best used by an experienced practitioner working in conjunction with your vet to tailor-make a programme to suit your animal's needs.

Stem cell therapy is an option to consider as some animals seem to show improvement in their condition.

When none of these changes is making enough of a difference we make use of painkillers such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (which may occasionally have side effects such as causing gastric ulcers and sometimes kidney problems) to ease pain.

They usually have a dramatic effect. In many animals with painful arthritis that is unresponsive to other therapies the benefits usually outweigh the relatively small risk of side effects.

Other supportive care is important to help preserve quality of life. Warm and comfortable bedding will go a long way to keeping them comfortable and some dogs and cats benefit from special magnetic beds that theoretically help to improve their vitality.

Older animals with arthritis are less inclined to move around, stopping regular wear of their nails which can grow long enough to put strain on their nail base or even grow inward into their pads which is extremely painful.

Decreased flexibility also makes it difficult for animals to groom themselves, especially if they are obese, leading to knotted coats which are uncomfortable and also harbour parasites such as fleas. Regular nail trimming and grooming is often imperative.

With a comprehensive treatment plan, a great deal of quality can be added to your companion animal's life and often quantity, too. 🐾

improve circulation and the latter is also useful for its natural anti-inflammatory properties. Dogs can be given 50-250mg of dried turmeric one to three times a day and cats 50-100mg daily, but occasionally it can cause a runny tummy so take care to monitor for this.

Devil's claw and other plant extracts such as epitalis can also be very useful.

Massage of the tight muscles trying to compensate for the pain is very helpful as these are frequently tired and sore. Gentle massage is loved by most animals and helps to stimulate circulation.

Gentle, low-impact exercise, such as hydrotherapy, swimming or walks on the beach, is of vital importance to help keep supporting muscles strong and contribute to general well-being.